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ABSTRACT

This guide explains how individuals and American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) chapters can work with school systems to reduce discrimination against students of Arab background and to educate teachers and other students about the cultures of the Middle East. Arab Americans can make a difference in the school systems by personal involvement in the schools and by providing teachers with the many excellent teaching materials that have been developed in recent years. The first step, and key to success, is to identify and develop relationships with interested, sympathetic, and committed people in the school system. Efforts can focus on the curriculum, the evaluation of textbooks for accurate and unbiased information about Arabs, and the education of teachers. The relationships of Arab Americans with the schools must be guided by a commitment to educational excellence. An appendix contains a sample letter to school officials asking to schedule a meeting about the concerns of ADC members. (SLD)

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Educational Outreach and Action Guide

Working with School Systems

Part of ADC's "Reaching the Teachers" Campaign

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ADC Guides are published by the ADC Research Institute on subjects of special interest to the Arab-American community. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) is a non-sectarian, non-partisan service organization committed to defending the rights and promoting the heritage of Arab-Americans. The largest grassroots Arab-American organization in the United States, ADC was founded in 1980 by former U.S. Senator James Abourezk in response to stereotyping, defamation and discrimination directed against Americans of Arab descent. ADC serves its nationwide membership through direct advocacy in cases of defamation, through legal action in cases of discriminaiton, and through counseling in matters of immigration.

The ADC Research Institute publishes information on issues of concern to Arab-Americans and provides educational materials on Arab history and culture as well as the ethnic experience of Arabs in American. It also sponsors summer internships in Washington, D.C., for college students.

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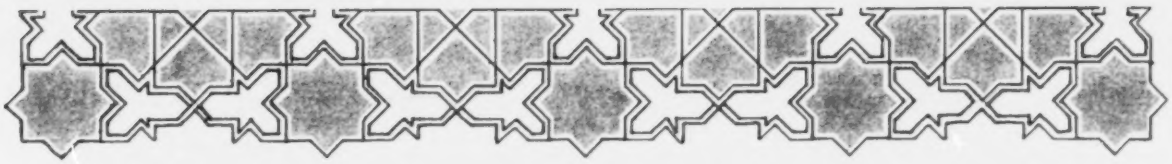


During recent years, few ADC campaigns generated such immediate enthusiasm as our "Teaching the Teachers" campaign. From the time we began discussing this idea, our members have responded with a clear endorsement and willingness to commit their own time, creativity and energy.

Clearly, education remains a top priority for the Arab-American community. Like many immigrant communities, we identified education as one of the most important assets in establishing ourselves in this country. What is more, we come from a culture that respects and promotes knowledge and learning.

We are beginning to establish ourselves, to successfully fend off the worst and most blatant racist attacks. Although these problems continue, let us not lose sight of the fact that we have come a long way in a relatively short period of time.

However, these efforts and achievements, are not enough. We need to attack the roots of misunderstanding, prejudice and racism. Thus, we turn to the classroom, and to the ideas and lessons that affect our children and our neighbors' children.

Our task is two-fold. First, we must promote a positive understanding of Arab culture and heritage to make sure that none of our children ever returns home from school ashamed to be an Arab. Second, we must support efforts at promoting tolerance, understanding and appreciation for other cultures.

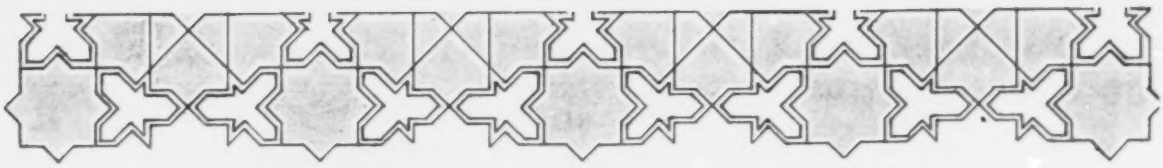
From the moment we began work on this campaign, two assumptions shaped our work: that most teachers are motivated by a desire to provide our children with the best possible education; and more importantly, that you, our members, are our most vital resource. In the Arab-American community and among the friends who know us well, we have an amazing wealth of personal experience and expertise. This provides an array of opportunities we have only begun to organize. Teachers would love to have individuals come and speak about their immigrant experience, to talk about their home countries. We can exhibit costumes, provide a taste of Arabic home-cooking. Of course, these opportunities should not be conducted haphazardly, but we must learn from one another.

Even if you are too busy to get involved with your local school system in an ongoing way, our "Teaching the Teachers" campaign provides a way for everyone to do something for ADC and the Arab-American community. For example, virtually every parent attends parent-teacher conferences at one time or another. The next time you go in, take a copy of ADC's *Teachers' Resources on the Middle East* and present it to your child's teacher.

We believe that "Teaching the Teachers" provides an important opportunity for everyone to make a contribution. Many ADC members, once active, had to reduce their level of activity as family demands increased. Now, they, too, can stay involved.

ADC will continue to try to update this material on a regular basis, stay abreast of new opportunities and make sure we are getting the information into your hands. But for this campaign to be the success that we believe it can be, we must have your help.

Albert Mokhiber
President



Working With School Systems

An Outreach and Action Guide

by

Marvin Wingfield and Shereen Salam

The most important resource we can offer to educators is ourselves. The Arab-American community is rich in talent, experience and character. Our personal and collective life histories provide a reservoir of insight and understanding which should be made available to schools. We ourselves are and can be teachers.

Our goal must be to help ensure educational excellence in teaching about the Middle East. Educators are eager to have good teaching materials on the Arab world, but they are often poorly informed, textbooks are full of inaccuracies and misinterpretations, and teachers sometimes reflect the familiar anti-Arab biases of Western culture. Arab-Americans can correct this situation by providing materials and by familiarizing teachers with opportunities for professional enrichment, such as Arab-American community and cultural events, workshops and visiting speakers, and study tours of the Middle East. We must see that any shortcomings are replaced by teaching and resources which meet the same professional standards required in other areas of study.

We should bear in mind that most teachers want to provide quality education. We should aproach them with an open mind and a positive attitude. As the old saying goes, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."

Arab-Americans can make a difference both by personal involvement in schools and by providing teachers with the many excellent teaching materials which have been developed in recent years. Our first-hand knowledge of Arab culture and the Middle East is an important educational resource. The personal dimension we can bring to classroom discussions can make the Middle East alive, real and appealing to students. Personal contact with members of the Arab community may be the single most important factor in overcoming stereotyped ideas about the Middle East.[1]

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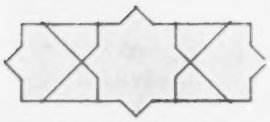
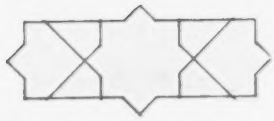
1 *This guide was produced by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee's Outreach Department in consultation with ADC activists Jamal Awad, Hani Bawardi, Nadia Bettendorf, Don Bustany, Amal David, Ferial El-Masri, Zana Mackl and Hamzi Moghrabi. Thanks also for the valuable advice of Sherifa Alkhateeb, Muslim Education Council; Elizabeth Barlow, Middle East Outreach Council; Bonnie Becker, Fairfax County Schools; Carol Bohannon; Nina Dodge, formerly with the Center for Contemporary Studies, Georgetown University; Samira Hussein; Leslie Nucho, AMIDEAST; Mary Seebold, Middle East Institute; and Audrey Shabbas, AWAIR.*

A discussion of Canadian school systems will be included in a future edition of this outreach guide.



What One Person Can Do



During the Gulf war, the son of an ADC family in Maryland was harassed by others in his 6th grade class. The mother went to the school and explained to the teacher and the principal what had happened. In response, the school held a special session to sensitize staff and students to anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudices. When her son was harassed again, other children spoke up in his defense.

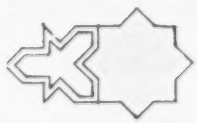
As a result, the mother became actively involved with the school. At the annual International Festival, she set up an Arabic cultural booth which was very popular. She was invited to join the committee to select a new principal, and she helped ensure that a principal supporting multicultural education was hired. She made friends with the principal and developed relationships with members of the School Board and the county Human Relations Commission, which invited her to be on a panel to speak to a group of teachers about Arab culture and the school curriculum. She got the Human Relations Commission to include Muslim holidays on the county calendar. An Islamic organization gave her a book to donate to the school library. She arranged for an Arabic translation of the county's handbook for parents. She wrote brief articles, such as recipes for Arab food, for the PTA newsletter. She got involved with other Arab-Americans working with the local school systems.

The next year she was appointed the chief organizer for the International Festival; she knocked on doors, called all the other parents (who recognized her name from the newsletter) and got others from the Arab and Muslim communities involved. The festival was a big success.

Now she is working with other Arab-Americans and a member of the textbook selection committee to get the *Arab World Notebook* into each of the county schools.

This is not an isolated example. A number of other very energetic and creative Arab-Americans have made a real impact on the schools of their communities. Still, while committed individuals are always at the heart of this kind of work, effective, long-term success in raising the educational level of a school system or even of a single school can come only through the collective effort of an organized community.

What ADC Chapters Can Do



We can approach our school systems with confidence. The multicultural approach to education is standard today. Teachers, librarians and administrators are eager to have good teaching materials on the Middle East. Schools especially welcome parental involvement in the educational process. The doors are open for Arab-American participation. We have resources to offer and we can expect to find a climate of receptivity to our overtures.

ADC chapters have, in fact, already done much solid work with school systems through educating the educators about the Arab world and the Arab-American community. Chapters have held workshops, provided speakers and resources, organized textbook campaigns and challenged discrimination.

ADC chapters in Michigan have a very active committee of Arab-American educators and have been deeply involved with the school system. Michigan's large Arab community is unique, but some elements in its program can be adapted to other communities.

The Detroit chapter invited the Superintendent of Schools to meet with leaders of the Arab community over dinner at an Arabic restaurant. They asked her to explain her plans for addressing the needs of Arab students and providing multicultural education to counteract stereotypes and negative images of Arabs. The chapter asked the Superintendent and School Board for a commitment to educate all students, teachers and administrators about the Arab community. The chapter arranged for groups of teachers and students to tour the Arab community, visit the mosque, meet the business community and learn about the culture. A ranking Arab-American school official was honored at a chapter banquet. (Teachers who have done an especially effective or creative job of teaching about the Middle East could be honored in a similar way.)

In recent years, the community asked the school systems to declare an Arab Culture Week, during which schools in Dearborn and Detroit had events every day — Arab cultural displays, speakers, media presentations, workshops, folklore and dance with traditional dress and music. The chapter works with the city to provide job openings for Arab-Americans in the schools. It has a liaison to meet with school officials regarding any problems which arise; meetings with parents are organized to discuss problems and the chapter brings these issues to the attention of school officials. At a bilingual conference the chapter provided speakers to discuss Arab culture and the special dynamics affecting Arab children in the schools. The chapter was asked to recommend Arabic literature to be purchased for the school libraries.

In Los Angeles ADC members worked together with the county Department of Education to hold a training conference for teachers. They raised money for the event, got Arab churches and mosques involved, organized "Arab Parents for Education" and set up a bazaar. Teachers met many members of the Arab community and felt something of its warmth and hospitality. It was more than an academic experience. ADC also provided speakers on discrimination at conferences held by the Orange County Human Relations Commission. The chapter takes a leading role in a "Coalition of American Organizations for Education about the Arab World."

One Arab-American mother takes Arab (and other) children to perform Arabic dances at schools, in traditional dress, with Arabic music, poetry, and songs. They bring visual displays, discuss Arab culture and religions and have question and

answer sessions with the students. They held an Arab Festival and taught Arab dances to children, shared Middle Eastern food and put on a fashion show. The students learn more thoroughly by this personal contact and active engagement. "This is the best festival we ever had," said one student.

The Denver chapter placed 80 copies of the *Arab World Notebook* in city schools. They also persuaded the schools to withdraw textbooks which had a negative characterization of Arabs and ignored Palestinian history.

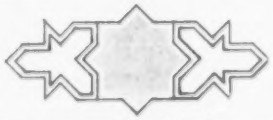
In Virginia, an Arab-American arranged to have copies of the *Arab World Notebook* placed in each of the schools in the county. She testified before the School Board regarding incidents of discrimination in the schools and asked them to hold a seminar on Arab culture. Also in Virginia, a county Human Relations Office used the ADC Hate Crimes Report creatively to develop a lesson plan for teachers.

The Chicago chapter has opposed discriminatory practices by teachers and succeeded in removing inadequate teaching material from the curricula.

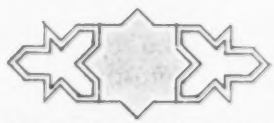
Much has already been accomplished. Many ADC chapters have a strong and effective involvement with their school systems. In addition, a number of university-based centers for Middle East studies have active community outreach programs of teacher training, speakers bureaus, and audio-visual libraries. Many school systems already draw on the excellent teaching materials provided by organizations such as AMIDEAST, AWAIR, the Middle East Outreach Council and the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations (and its Canadian counterpart).

We do not need to reinvent the wheel or to duplicate the work already being done. Often one of the most important things we can do is to let teachers know about the wealth of materials available from the network of Middle East-related organizations. We must support and reinforce one another's work.

Be prepared to be challenged, but the key to effective work is to keep our efforts focused on the positive contributions and enhanced educational opportunities we can provide.



Where to Begin



The first step and the key to success is to identify and develop relationships with interested, sympathetic and committed people within the school system. They may be active Arab-American parents or teachers, teachers with some knowledge of the Middle East and a commitment to teaching in depth, teachers who use ADC resources or speakers in their classes, or ADC members who have a history of involvement with the school system. Activists from other ethnic communities or from religious or

peace and justice organizations can also be helpful. Work with them as individuals or form a committee.

Many Arab-American parents are already actively involved with the schools their children attend. They have an established and recognized voice in school affairs and can play a major role. A campaign of outreach to schools is an opportunity for the chapter to get new people involved in ADC work, especially those members whose commitments are family- and child-focused.

Sympathetic individuals within the school system are our base of support. These are the gatekeepers, an entre into the system. They can provide information about the structure and operations of the school system and about the most important individuals with whom you need to deal. They can introduce you to people, invite you to meetings, recommend your work, support your views and nominate you for positions. They can help and advise in school-related projects. Ambitious projects such as organizing a teacher-training workshop should have the cooperation of someone within the school system. Gradually, a network of relationships can be built up throughout the school system. Invite them to Arab-American community events.

A related task is to *research the structure of the school system and its operating procedures.* Your contacts within the school system can advise you about the parts of it familiar to them. The phone book will list the main offices and departments and each school in the system. You can get a set of booklets with basic information on the school system by a call to their central office. This will include the names and addresses of School Board members and senior administrative staffpeople (Superintendent of Education, Assistant Superintendents for instruction, student services and school/community relations). It will provide a mailing list for each school in the district and the name of its principal, information on the course offerings for each grade level and a list of the Citizen Advisory Committees through which the public can help shape educational policy.

Do not hesitate to ask questions. This is your prerogative as citizens. Gradually the chapter should accumulate as part of its collective wisdom a knowledge of the structure and operating procedure of the educational system. This would include everything from education committees in the state legislature, the state Department of Education, and the local school district with its elected School Board and network of committees. Most important of all are your local schools, teachers and administrators.

The school personnel handling social studies are especially important. These include the Social Studies Coordinator for the district and the head of the Social Studies Department in each school. They will have responsibility for multicultural and global education.

Experienced educational activists advise that meeting with key school officials is a must. Some of the key offices and officials are:

State:	-- Secretary of Education -- Department of Education -- Social Studies Coordinator -- Textbook Selection Committee
School District:	-- members of the Board of Education -- Superintendent of Education -- Social Studies Coordinator -- professional staff development office -- Human Relations office -- citizens' committees (see below)
Schools:	-- Social Studies Coordinator -- teachers -- principal -- librarian -- guidance counselors

Contact as many as these offices as you can. Arrange to meet with them to bring the concerns, resources and goodwill of the Arab-American community. Find out if they know how many Arab-American students and teachers are in their schools. Are Orthodox Christian and Muslim holidays acknowledged like those of other traditions? For example, are school officials aware that Orthodox Easter may fall on a different day from "Western" Easter and that Orthodox students may desire to attend Good Friday services. Similarly, school officials should know the major Islamic feast days and that some students may desire to fast during Ramadan. Have a few specific requests to make of school officials. Invite them to Arab-American community events. Help them to get to know the community. Cultivate the relationships. We can be *their* gatekeepers.

Gaining the support and cooperation of state or district administrative officials can be important. If the state Social Studies Coordinator recommends it, you can place materials in every school district, without having to approach each school separately. However, decentralized "school-based management" is the current philosophy and sometimes bureaucratic procedures at the city or county level are impediments. It might be more effective to work directly with schools and teachers.

After perhaps six months, arrange another meeting to evaluate the implementation of what was agreed upon in the first meeting. Continue meeting together, as seems appropriate.

Establish a positive and cooperative relationship. A personal visit to schools is important. A letter or materials sent from an unknown organization may be disregarded. Personal contact from a community organization, especially if parents with children in the school are involved, will be much better received and will elicit more trust and cooperation. (Parental involvement in the PTA is also a good way to meet and develop relationships with school personnel.)

The Principal's role is overall coordination and direction of the staff, teachers and students at a particular school. This includes the design of policy and programs and curriculum design and evaluation. Principals usually attend the monthly meetings of the School Board and send in a weekly report. Teachers are immersed in the daily short-term work concerns; principals have responsibility for longer-term program issues. But schools are hectic places and both teachers and administrators are often consumed with responding to the unpredictable events of the day. Their busiest times are Mondays and Fridays, exam periods, periods before vacations, September, May and June. These are not good times to try to meet with them.

Principals and School Board members, attend many community meetings as an official responsibility. You may well meet them informally at church suppers, fraternal organization, or a school event, or serve with them on the board of a community organization. These are good opportunities to get acquainted and develop a relationship.

Invite Principals and School Board members to attend or speak at Arab-American community events. Ask them to explain the multicultural program at the school. Invite their spouses and families as well. They may welcome a chance to have a night out together.

Learn how the library system in the school district is organized and what the procedures are for selecting books. Librarians are always alert for new materials (especially if they are free). Find out their needs and try to provide good materials. Examine the library holdings on Arab-Americans and the Middle East. If there are imbalances and omissions, call this to the attention of the librarian and offer to recommend or help provide good materials. (Donated materials must usually be approved by a library committee.)[1]

The state conference of the Council for the Social Studies is another good place to have a table, distribute materials and meet teachers.

Obviously one or two people cannot do all the work. *A chapter Subcommittee on Education is needed.* Make a point of including Arab-American educators, parents

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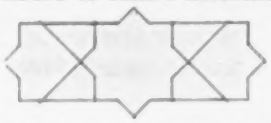
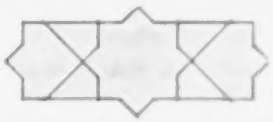
1 *Do not neglect to check the listings at the public library as well. Citizens can recommend and donate books — subject again to approval. Should you find a pattern of bias, contact David Williams who is with the American Library Association and monitors bias and censorship in local libraries: 1903 W. Newport Ave., #2, Chicago, IL 60657.*

and students, who already have an intimate involvement with the schools and have a great deal of knowledge about them. Later, other members of the community can be trained to work with schools. The subcommittee could hold a training seminar for chapter members to share information and skills.



Curriculum



The curriculum in a subject area includes books and other materials, lesson plans, classroom activity plans and a statement of educational goals.

Materials related to the Middle East are covered in courses on world history and geography. American history courses teach about U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. American history courses should deal with Arab-Americans, Islam in American and immigration from the Middle East.

Many textbooks in these subjects are deficient, inaccurate, stereotyped or otherwise flawed. They do not meet acceptable standards of academic competence and should be replaced. These deficiencies have been documented in an important resource which should be used by the Curriculum Committee of every state or school system. The Middle East Outreach Council (MEOC) and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) have published a compilation of scholarly evaluations of textbooks entitled *Text Evaluation Project*. School systems should know about this valuable resource and be urged to make use of it in their selection and replacement of textbooks.

Courses in government, civics, and sociology should address issues of racism, discrimination, stereotyping and human rights. These issues are also taught in the social justice courses in Catholic and other religious school systems.

School systems vary as to the grades in which these subjects are taught. Often world history is taught in 6th grade and again in high school. Geography is taught in elementary school. Social justice issues are covered in high school.

Each subject area may have its own department and county or city coordinator, depending on how large and bureaucratized the system is.

Some school systems hold "resource fairs" for each subject area in the curriculum during the summer or early fall. Outside organizations can set up a booth, pass out literature, meet teachers and discuss issues. This is an opportunity to develop relationships and to let teachers know the kinds of resources which are available.

Textbook Evaluation Process

Each state has an elaborate bureaucratic procedure for evaluating textbooks. This procedure will vary somewhat in different states. Seventeen states have a state-level process for selecting several textbooks in each field of study; local school districts then choose the book they prefer from the options presented by the state. Sensitizing these state level officials should be a top priority; they can insure that local districts select only first-rate textbooks.

Many states follow the lead of California and Texas in textbook selection; once a book is accepted in those states, it is often adopted in other states.

There will be one or more school districts within each city and county political jurisdiction. The procedure at the level of the local school district is similar in most states.

The Denver school system, for example, publishes a booklet on "Policies and Procedures for Selecting and Adopting Instructional Materials in the Denver Public School." The booklet also includes an annual schedule for the selection process, sample forms to use in submitting critiques of instructional materials and a statement of principles regarding controversial issues. Other cities and counties should have similar materials.

Denver can serve as our example; it will be necessary, however, to inquire into local variations in each community.

In Denver, the elected Board of Education in the School District is responsible for determining the selection of textbooks. Supplemental materials are the responsibility of school principals in consultation with teachers and administrative staff. The judgment of curriculum development supervisors is also taken into consideration.

According to the Denver booklet, textbooks must reflect the "diversity and cultural pluralism of America." Materials must "provide balanced and accurate multiethnic presentations." In addition they must foster critical thinking and reasoning and enable students "to discover relationships, to generalize, to draw conclusions, to build concepts, to apply basic principles."

These basic educational principles correspond to the values inherent in ADC's work. There are institutionalized procedures that allow members of the community to help ensure that these principles are lived up to. Denver is our example again.

Textbook Selection

Any of the professional staff in the Denver School District can recommend materials to the appropriate subject-area Curriculum Committee, i.e. the committee for social studies, literature, etc. The committee reviews and evaluates the materials. Materials are also reviewed by four teachers from different schools.

There are ten Parent Advisory Committees in the District. Parents active in the parent organizations associated with each school are appointed to the committees by school principals. the committees also evaluate the proposed textbooks.

There is also an opportunity for input from any citizen or group. Proposed textbooks are displayed at schools or other public centers in January and February. Any citizen can submit a written evaluation. There may also be public hearings, where community organizations can offer testimony. This is the occasion to make use of the MEOC/MESA textbook evaluations. A complete notebook of evaluations is available for purchase from MEOC.

Subject-area supervisors respond to the comments and evaluations by parents and citizens. All evaluations go to the Board of Education, which makes the decision.

Text recommendations are made once a year. In each subject area, such as social studies, textbooks are reviewed and perhaps changed on a regular cycle, perhaps on a three- or five-year cycle.

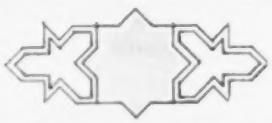
Textbook Critiques

Critiques of textbooks already in use can also be made. The Denver School District has a Committee to Review Questioned Instructional Materials, composed of members of the professional staff of schools and selected from different schools by Curriculum Services. It includes teachers, administrators and parents elected from the Parents Advisory Committees on textbooks.

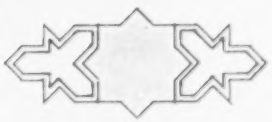
Textbooks can be criticized in terms of the adequacy of the author's knowledge of the subject matter, unfair treatment of controversial issues or unfair or inaccurate treatment of a particular group of persons. These may be matters of judgment, requiring evaluation by a number of "thoughtful persons."

Critiques must be signed statements and can be submitted by citizens or by professional educators. This is another occasion to use the MEOC/MESA textbook evaluations. The Committee studies the critique and makes a recommendation to the School Board, which has responsibility for the final decision.

The best advice is to "cooperate with ongoing curriculum projects. Work within the school system's schedule of textbook selection. This is the most effective way of getting good materials into the required curriculum. This is a long-term process and requires a serious, enduring commitment.



Teachers



Teacher-Training Workshops

Despite the multicultural philosophy of the educational profession, there is at the same time a great lack of informed understanding and basic "cultural competence" among teachers with regard to the Middle East. Those who give workshops for teachers and administrators often find it necessary to begin at the most elementary level. Even history teachers may not know, for example, that there are Arab Christians. Teachers need to learn about the Arab world and about how to teach it. They rely on conferences and workshops to supplement and strengthen their knowledge of specific areas of study.

Teacher-training workshops are offered by university Middle East centers and AWAIR. In areas where these organizations do not already have an ongoing program of workshops, the ADC chapter can initiate a workshop and act as the mediator between these organizations and the school district.

AWAIR does workshops all over the U.S. and is available to work with ADC chapters. Each workshop participant receives a substantial package of materials, including a copy of the *Arab World Notebook*. By providing the *Notebook* to a whole group of teachers and building excitement about using it, it becomes the generally adopted curriculum for the secondary schools of the entire district. The University of Chicago Center for Middle Eastern Studies also holds workshops around the country and does an excellent, professional job. Other Middle East outreach centers hold periodic workshops in their areas.

A workshop requires the cooperation of school administrative personnel. Teachers can provide advice about obstacles, authorization, financing and credits. Some workshops have been attempted and failed, attracting perhaps three people — because the organizers had no effective mechanism to motivate teachers to attend.

Work with the school district's Social Studies Coordinator and Professional Development staff to plan and publicize the workshop and to recruit teachers. The Social Studies Coordinator can send a letter to teachers, saying "I endorse this workshop. This is good. We need it. I want it." Arrangements can be made so that teachers get "Continuing Education Credits" (CEUs) or credit for required in-service education. The Social Studies Coordinator can put the Arab world on the list of

topics for which credit is given. Teachers need authorization to take "released time" from school to attend. School systems can sometimes provide financing to set up workshops, although with current tight budgets, chapters may need to raise money for them. Often, however, schools need only supply space, audio-visual equipment and publicity.

Local school systems have been hit hard by huge Federal budget cuts. As a result teacher training workshops have suffered. The trend is to use videos and interactive teleconferencing instead. There is often no money to pay substitute teachers to cover classes while teachers attend workshops. If ADC raises funds for a workshop, they should be used to pay substitute teachers, not for high fees for speakers or for an expensive hall.

Another practical suggestion: Avoid scheduling workshops near the exam period or other busy times during the school year. Check with teachers as to the preferred times and be sure it fits comfortably into the school calendar. Be careful not to compete with already-scheduled workshops.

If it is not feasible to work with a university Middle East center or other organizations to hold a workshop, the ADC chapter could organize one on its own, utilizing the skills and expertise of local academics and members of the Arab-American community. The Los Angeles chapter, in conjunction with the school system, held a conference on the Arab world, which was attended by 250 teachers.

Workshops should be designed around teachers' interests and needs. Have teachers help design the program, select the topics and the grade-level towards which it should be oriented.

Teachers should be treated with respect. Often they are talked down to and treated in a patronizing way, as if they were on the same intellectual level as the children they teach. Teachers respond eagerly when workshops are carried out on a professional academic level. Their participation and discussion of issues is often equal to that of college faculty.

The National Education Association (NEA) is the largest teachers' union in the U.S. Contact the state and local affiliates, usually listed in the phone book. They publish newsletters which can run articles, classroom ideas and human interest stories relevance to Arab-Americans and the Middle East. NEA also has a national publication which can do the same. Access to these publications is only available to NEA members. Encourage Arab-American teachers to join NEA and place items in NEA publications.

Classroom Ideas

Given enough time, most teachers would research every unit they teach and come up with creative ideas and lessons. The fact is, however, that most teachers do not have the time or resources to devise original lesson plans for every unit. In order to do our part in reaching elementary through high school students, we must work closely with teachers and give them assistance. Teachers value good materials and creative ideas which can be easily applied in the classroom. Here are a few ideas to pass on to teachers.

In elementary grades, students learn best by "doing" and seeing. ADC can assist elementary school teachers by providing handouts which include concise historical and cultural information on a given topic. From this information, the teacher can plan lessons and activities.

For example, after reading and discussing various aspects of Egyptian society, the students can do some of the following activities: design a postcard from Egypt, design a travel brochure to attract tourists, plan an imaginary trip to Egypt (taking into account a budget and actually calling the airlines, etc.), correspond with a pen pal, write messages in hieroglyphics, compare and contrast children's lives in Egypt and America, draw the Egyptian flag, or draw a map of the region.

Students also love to listen to Arabic music. The teacher could have the students compare and contrast Arabic music to other kinds of music. Furthermore, posters with unconventional images of the Middle East would help break stereotypes. As a culminating activity for the unit, students could prepare Middle Eastern food to share with one another.

The needs of a high school teacher are quite similar to those of an elementary school teacher. Concise information about a topic is beneficial, but should be on a more advanced level. *The Arab World Notebook* is a comprehensive guide for secondary school teaching about the historical and cultural background of Arab countries. It provides useful and innovative lesson plans and handouts which can easily be used in the classroom.

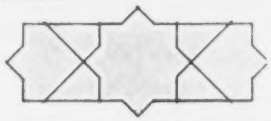
In addition, high school students could compare and contrast the *Al Fajr*, a Palestinian newspaper, and the *Jerusalem Post*, an Israeli newspaper, both available in the U.S. Students could watch excerpts from Hollywood films that depict Arabs and have a lesson on identifying images which stereotype Arabs in negative ways. A debate on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict would also be a worthwhile lesson. Students would benefit from slide shows and guest speakers.

In order to be of use to teachers, we must supply them with handouts which provide accurate and significant information, visual aids, and ideas for specific activities

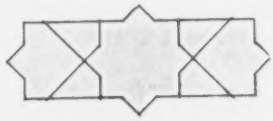
which can be applied in the classroom. The teacher can then adapt the material to suit his or her teaching style.

The important thing is that children must first learn to appreciate and respect Arab culture. Then they will be able to recognize and feel the offensiveness of stereotyped images and discriminatory attitudes.

ADC is compiling examples of creative teaching. If you or educators you know have examples of creative lesson plans, please send them to the ADC Outreach Department.



Committees



One of the most effective ways to have an influence on school policies is through active service on volunteer committees. In some school districts, professionals and citizens serve on the same committees; sometimes parallel committees are set up for professionals and citizens. The most important committees include:

- *Social studies curriculum advisory committee.* This committee has direct responsibility for the teaching of many of the issues with which we are concerned.

- *Textbook selection committees.* These have responsibility for evaluating and selecting textbooks. Each subject area usually has a separate committee, e.g. a committee for history, a committee for science, etc.

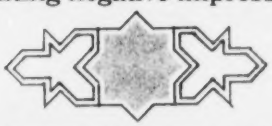
- *Human relations advisory committee.* This committee is important because it does attitude training and can be the instrument for sensitizing teachers and administrators to issues of discrimination and stereotyping. Some school districts annually ask ADC for names of people to serve on the committee. Every school district should hold sessions to sensitize all teachers and administrators to Arab-Americans and the problems of stereotyping and discrimination.

- *"Gifted and talented" committee.* This is focused on advanced students who have been targeted by state governments for leadership training, special seminars and programs. There may be few minority students included, since testing procedures are often culturally slanted and much evaluation of students is affected by the biases of individual teachers.

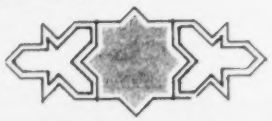
Committee members are appointed, sometimes by school boards, sometimes by the recommendation of a school department. After establishing your credentials through concerned and responsible involvement at a school, indicate your willing-

ness to take on the further responsibilities of serving on a committee. Once appointed, it is essential to attend each meeting and bear your share of the committee's work. Before offering your services, carefully evaluate the time you have available and the work expected of committee members.

Regretably, ADC is also aware of situations where chapters struggled to get people appointed to committees -- only to discover that, once appointed, people never attended meetings. If people find that they do not have the time to follow through, they should acknowledge this and arrange for a substitute. Otherwise, the resulting negative impressions can set back many months of work.



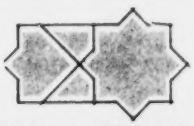
Campus Chapters



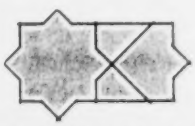
Campus chapters of ADC can play a particularly important role through outreach to the Department of Education at their colleges and universities. The best way to reach teachers is to reach the institutions which train them and give them their initial professional formation.

Contact the Department of Education and find out how the Middle East is handled in their courses on cultural sensitivity and global and multicultural education. The Department may already have a good program and may, for example, draw resources from a university Middle East studies center. Have a chapter delegation meet with the faculty members who handle these courses. Discuss the widespread lack of knowledge about the Arab world among teachers, the documented inadequacies of many school textbooks and the anti-Arab bigotry Arab-American students have encountered in schools. Share resources with them and ask that they be included in the regular handouts given to students in the courses.

Another tactic would be to set up an information table in front of the education building. Sympathetic students could also hand out materials informally to classmates. Try to identify Arab-American education majors, who might have a special in these resources.



Dealing with Discrimination



Children of Middle East origin have faced problems of harassment, taunts, teasing and exclusion by other children. Sometimes teachers and administrators also show discriminatory attitudes. Stereotyped images and misinformation in textbooks may be taken as reality and go uncorrected. The Anti-Defamation League's "World of Difference" program to reduce prejudice, which is widely used across the country, ignores the existence of Arab-Americans and anti-Arab discrimination, and its only reference to Islam conveys a negative impression.

One well-intentioned but overworked and uninformed teacher in California used a textbook that described jihad as the "sixth pillar of Islam" and asked "Which sect of Islam is in charge of terrorism?" When an ADC member pointed out the distortions, the teacher acknowledged her shortcomings, made a point of studying Islam and gave a "beautiful lecture" on Islam to her students. "Don't fight with the teacher," advises the ADC member. "If we teach her, we gain her." That a teacher commits "cultural errors" is less important than sincerity, willingness to learn and commitment to quality education.

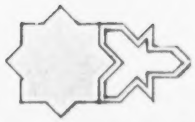
Educators strongly advise us not to present ourselves as a "special interest" pressure group. It would be a mistake to approach schools with a political agenda. That would be seen as inappropriate and offensive. Educators feel themselves to be "under siege" by numerous pressure groups of every variety. If they feel harassed and put on the defensive, our views will not get a serious hearing. We will become merely an irritant which must be "dealt with." An adversarial stance should be adopted only as a last resort. After all, our goal is not to "win" but to educate the educators and to establish positive ongoing relationships.

We have much more to offer than criticism. The Arab-American community is an important resource for educators. We can offer a much-needed service and many valuable resources, which can help ensure quality education for young people. To provide teachers with new resources is to empower them, enhance their professional autonomy and enable them to teach about the Arab world with greater authority.

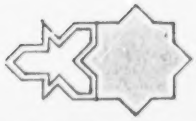
Our relationships with schools must be guided by a commitment to educational excellence. We owe nothing less to all the children of our communities. They need to understand the Arab world. We can ensure that they come to understand it accurately and sympathetically.

Sometimes recourse to more formal procedures is required. Procedures for changing instructional materials are described above. In addition, each school district should have a Human Relations Committee which handles intergroup tensions and incidents of bias. The city or county should have a Human Relations Commission, which may have responsibility for school-related issues.

Do not wait until there is an incident. Arrange a meeting with the Committee to introduce the concerns of the Arab-American community. Establish a good relationship and sensitize the committee to the problems experienced locally and nationally by the Arab community. Offer to provide a speaker at a committee meeting or at a conference for educators. Find Arab-Americans who are willing to serve on the committee and join in its work.



Dealing with "Controversy"



As we know, teaching about the Middle East is all too often seen as "controversial." There can be strongly felt disagreements about matters of fact, interpretation, emphasis and significance.

Teachers want factual material that is clearly distinct from political opinion, interpretation and advocacy. Educators tend to make a sharp distinction between materials that are "educational" and those that are "political." Like many people, they may be unaware of the ideological assumptions built into their viewpoint. The professional outlook of educators is permeated by the worldview and value system of democratic liberalism. The educational intention behind the "apolitical" stance is the desire to avoid advocacy for a particular political viewpoint or policy and to create a space in which a variety of viewpoints can be heard and critically evaluated.

In addition, educators may want to steer away from potential conflicts and stay within the mainstream consensus views and values of their community. This can go to extremes at times. When the schools in the occupied territories were closed down, a resolution before the national convention of the National Education Association calling for Palestinian schools to be reopened was defeated. American teachers could not be persuaded to support the education of Palestinian students! Political and cultural skittishness outweighed the value placed on education. The following year, however, the NEA convention did pass a similar resolution.

The Palestinian issue is, of course, seen as the most controversial. Making that issue a focal point might be seen as politically motivated. The Palestinian/Israeli conflict is usually addressed as one, important -- but by no means the only -- aspect of an overall survey of the Arab world. Occasionally a course is offered which makes it a primary issue.

The educational principles involved in presenting controversial issues are clear. The purpose of education should not be indoctrination but enlightenment. An official statement by the Denver public school system, for example, states

> Controversy is inherent in the democratic way of life. It is essential, therefore that the study and discussion of controversial issues have an important place in education for citizenship in a free society.

It goes on to say that

> Students can develop into free citizens with informed loyalty only through the process of examining evidence, facts, and differing viewpoints; through the exercise of freedom of thought and moral choice; and through the

> making of responsible decisions. These procedures are as characteristic of, and essential, to a free society as authoritarian indoctrination is to totalitarianism.

Teachers have then both the right and the obligation to teach about controversial issues.

In reality, of course, teachers and administrators have a natural human aversion to being subjected to criticism and embarrassment and having to justify themselves to angry parents or superiors. They worry about their job security. Teachers may shy away from issues and viewpoints that could get them in trouble with principals, school boards or parents. They may not always live up to their own educational ideals.

It is important that we be sensitive to the professional ethos of educators and to any sense of personal or institutional vulnerability that they may have. Respecting their values and limits is essential to building an effective long-term relationship. It is not pressure but persistence that will bring about changes in personal understanding and institutional policies. Desire to avoid controversy is, however, not a legitimate justification for continuing to use materials which misinform students or perpetuate stereotypes. Challenge educators to live up to their own ideals.

APPENDIX

Sample Letter

Sample Letter to School Officials (Superintendent of Education, School Board members, Social Studies Coordinator, etc.) Please adapt this letter to fit the circumstances of the local Arab-American community, the chapter and any previous or ongoing relationship with the school system. A positive and affirmative approach is strongly recommended.

Dear _____:

We are writing as representatives of the _____ chapter of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the largest grass-roots Arab-American civil rights organization in the U.S. Many parents in our community have children in the school system.

ADC has had many requests from teachers for information on the Arab world, especially in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Our community has many valuable resources for educators, and we would like to be of service to the school system. We can offer materials on the Arab-American heritage and the history and culture of the Arab world. We also have a contribution to make in the area of inter-ethnic relations and the multicultural curriculum.

We would like to schedule a meeting in which several representatives of the ADC chapter can share our concerns and resources and learn how we can most effectively make a meaningful contribution to the schools of our community. We would also like to discuss problems which have arisen in regard to ..... (if there have been problems of discrimination, objectionable classroom material, etc.)

I will call to arrange a convenient time for the meeting.

Sincerely,

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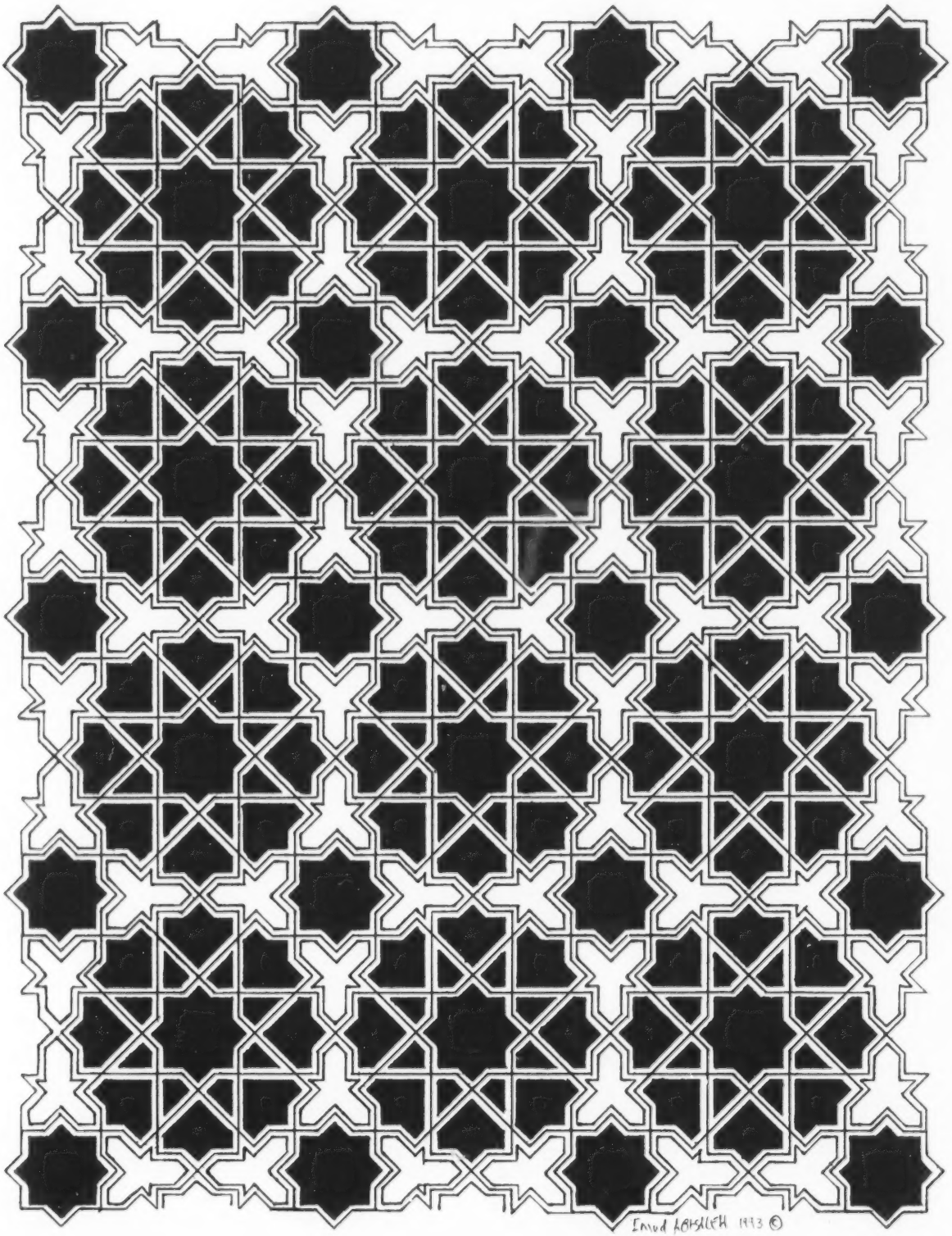

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